



Land-of-Sky RPO

Buncombe • Haywood • Madison • Transylvania Counties

March 31, 2010

Bob Weiss
Fiscal Research Division
North Carolina General Assembly
Suite 619, Legislative Office Building
300 N. Salisbury Street
Raleigh, NC 27603-5925

RE: Request for Comments on Issues Related to the State's Method for Distributing Transportation Funds

Dear Mr. Weiss:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the following comments concerning the formula currently used by the State of North Carolina for distribution of transportation funds. These comments were developed by the members of the Land-of-Sky RPO TCC and TAC. The following comments are submitted on behalf of the Land-of-Sky RPO:

Appalachian Development Highway System Funding should be excluded from the equity formula. The Land-of-Sky RPO passed a resolution (copy attached) in September, 2009 requesting that Appalachian Development Highway System funds be excluded from the equity formula. The ADHS program was designed to channel additional funding into the Appalachian Region, not to supplant existing funding. Taking these funds through the equity formula violates the intent of the program and decreases the availability of other funds to our region.

Population figures should consider all users within the region, including college students and tourists. College students enrolled in institutions located within the region are users of the transportation system, too, and if they are residing in a region for the majority of the year while enrolled, they should count towards the total population of the area. Western North Carolina is also a tourist destination, resulting in a large impact on our transportation infrastructure that is not captured in the existing method for determining the population of a region. In addition, second home ownership in the region is high, further skewing population figures.

Topography and environmental constraints have a major impact on transportation cost, which should be accounted for in the formula used to distribute funds. The topographic and environmental conditions of the mountains of Western North Carolina have a significant impact on the development of our region's transportation system. It is more costly to construct a mile of road in the mountains than in the Piedmont. This disparity in construction cost should be taken into consideration in any formula used to distribute funds throughout the state.

The number of intrastate miles left to complete in a region does not accurately capture actual need on the ground. The use of this criterion as a primary component of the equity formula means that actual need in a region is not accurately factored into the distribution of funds. This criteria should either be removed from the funding formula, should be modified by adding a variable (such as miles of road within a


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region) that more accurately captures real need, or should come with a stipulation that funds be applied to the remaining intrastate miles to complete.

Safety needs to be considered in the formula used to distribute funds. Rural roads have significant safety issues which are not captured in the current formula. Although population may be lower in rural areas, crash rates on rural roads are often higher than the rates found on comparable facilities in more urbanized areas. According to the Federal Highway Administration, the majority of fatalities occur on rural roads and the fatality rate for rural crashes nationwide is more than twice the fatality rate for urban crashes. Concerns about safety on rural roads should be addressed in the equity formula, and efforts should be made to ensure that adequate funding is provided to address safety concerns on rural roads.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the formula used in North Carolina to distribute transportation funds. Please do not hesitate to contact the staff of the Land-of-Sky RPO if we can provide further assistance as you study this issue. The Land-of-Sky RPO looks forward to working with NCDOT, the North Carolina General Assembly, and other stakeholders as we continue to work together on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John L. Chandler", written over a horizontal line.

John L. Chandler
Chairman, Land-of-Sky RPO TAC

CC: Members, Land-of-Sky RPO TCC
Members, Land-of-Sky RPO TAC